

## Business Computing

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A free monthly publication for small business. Over 20 years experience providing computer and network solutions.

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### The Learning Center

**Getting a little help from DMOZ.** DMOZ (known also as the Open Directory or ODP) is the prime and most inclusive human edited directory of the Web. A web directory is like a huge reference library. The index is organized like a giant pyramid beginning from the broad and extending to the specific. It is built and maintained by a vast, global community of volunteer editors who are responsible for one or more individual categories of the directory. One major search engine that uses ODP's data is Google. In fact, Google's directory is nothing less than the downloaded ODP directory. Entries in the directory do have some significant effects for websites. It means you have at least two important links pointing to your website giving an increased ranking.



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## How Search Engines Operate and How to Take Advantage of the Process

Search engine use has become an important part of our online behaviour. In fact, it is even challenging email as the primary Internet activity. Users are positive about search engine use, but at the same time unsophisticated about how they use search engines. In addition, studies have indicated users are uninformed in the workings of the search process. Search engine technology has only been recently developed and we are only experiencing the crude beginnings.

To demonstrate how inadequate search engine technology is in certain roles, we can do a practical test. If we want to research computer maintenance companies in the city of London. Here we have a simple task that would seem ideally suited to a search engine such as Google. You would think the results would include a list of companies in the London area that are capable of fixing computers. The results tell a different story. On the first page you are presented with only two companies wedged between a list of half-pie directories that may include London based companies. Moving to subsequent pages you are dished up more bizarre findings. If you take the effort to check out the next few hundred (or thousand) results you will be sadly presented with very few relevant computer companies.

To research companies that maintain computers we ideally need a directory to browse rather than having to waste time with Internet searches. Yahoo is one of the biggest on the Internet, but the only problem here is to be assured of a listing you need to shell out \$300 per year. DMOZ is big free directory, but the only dilemma

is, it is a hassle getting listed. If you check out both these directories for computer maintenance companies you will note only a scanty number of listings.

Therefore, if you operate a website it is important to get listed on as many directories as possible. From our experiment with Google we can see that directories pay an important part in Internet exposure. Search engines are software devices that are constantly crawling the web updating their databases or indexes. When you search the Internet you are actually using the search engine's index, not searching the World Wide Web. This is why you receive the results of search at lightening speed. The search engines index itself being housed on a series of computer servers.

If you have a website that is an extension of your business, search engine optimization is vital. By carefully reviewing what business you are engaged in, you can come up with a series of words and phrases that will help expose your website to search engines. There is free software available on the Net to help you work through this process. Remember, if you want to get "found" on the Internet you need to research what terms people use to potentially arrive at your site.

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## Why “Open Office” is Worth Consideration as Valid Business Software

What is “Open Office.” Open Office is a suite of software like Microsoft Office. The most important difference being it is free!! You may ask, “How come it is free?” Or, “If it is free, is it any good?” The Open Office project is a historic development for the open (free) systems world. In today’s society, the rules by which software is created and distributed are changing. It is important to note in recent times, some of the most significant advances in our information world have resulted from the use of free software. Some examples are email, web browsers and Internet Relay Chat. All this software is freely available without restriction. The Open Office organization gives you these same freedoms for office documents such as word processing, spreadsheets, presentation software etc.

Who and what is the Open Office organization (OO)? OO is a project through which Sun

Microsystems is releasing the technology. Sun Microsystems was founded in 1982 upon three daring principles. One of the principles was open or free systems will ultimately triumph over closed systems. Sun Microsystems originally purchased the not-sopopular Star Office product from a small software company. It has now invested lots of money in developing Star Office making it a success. In an effort to improve it’s popularity Sun also released Open Office. OO now being a separate product. Developers from all communities have become directly involved in the improvement of OO. Sun regularly imports the best features from OO into Star Office. The difference is, the branded product Star Office comes with support. There is no direct support for OO.

What software is available in OO? Word processor, spreadsheet, drawing package, presentation software (like Powerpoint) plus other utilities are included. How compatible is it

with Microsoft Office? OO has nearly all the features of MS Office. All your files created under MS Office can be opened and edited by Open Office. However, conversion in and out of OO is not 100%. Another great plus for OO is you can save your files in MS Office format as well as Adobe PDF. No need to fork out big money for Adobe conversion software. The developers have also included a wizard called Auto-pilot which will scan your computer and convert your MS Office docs into OO format.

The cunning plan to topple MS Office dominance might not go as easily as suggested by many. Don’t forget this software is free and there are no margins to be made in the retail trade. OO can be downloaded from [www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org) With a 56K modem be prepared for a long wait. May 2002 was the first release. Several updates and improvements have since been added.



## How to Check what Pages are Stored with Search Engines

If you operate a website it is essential to keep track of your actual status with various search engines. One way of doing this is to make sure all your website pages are indexed with the popular SE’s. Remember, when people search the Web they not actually searching the Internet, but merely scanning the search engine’s index. If your pages are not in the database, there is no way your site will ever be “found”. To check an index, simply enter your domain name in a search, eg yourname.com. Most search engines will give you an exact match, so you can immediately see the number of pages indexed.

You could be surprised how many pages search engines overlook. By missing out some of your pages it means that you are reducing your exposure on the Internet. It is important to have a comprehensive sitemap displayed on your website. The sitemap should contain links to all pages you want indexed. By doing this a search engine crawler has an easy path to follow to index all of your pages. Another extremely important way to get exposure on the Internet is by inward links to your site. Not just from directories but from other sites. They say all roads lead to Rome.

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